

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY OF CHARLES H. BELL JR.

*Before the Committee on House Administration,
Subcommittee on Elections, November 16, 2007*

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee on the subject of voter registration and list maintenance.

This is a critical subject for the future of American elections. The integrity of the voter registration list is essential to the integrity of the entire elections process.

The subject of voter registration and list maintenance needs to be considered in light of two concerns. They are voter fraud and voter participation.

I would start by saying that voter participation is the lifeblood of the American political process. We should ensure that every eligible voter is able to cast their ballot. Interference with the right of any eligible voter to exercise their right to vote must not be tolerated.

But we must view any effort to cast or facilitate the casting of illegal votes with equal concern. Every illegal vote cancels out a legal one.

There are some who allege voter fraud is not a serious problem in the American elections process.

I would submit that they are incorrect.

Documented cases of organized voter fraud in Miami, Philadelphia, and East Chicago, as well as in Compton and Orange County, California are among the many examples that demonstrate why we cannot take the integrity of elections for granted.

Where the names of ineligible voters appear on the rolls they create an opportunity, and even an invitation, for fraud.

The Help America Vote Act took some important steps towards improving the quality of voter registration lists and insuring that voter rolls are clean and accurate, but more needs to be done.

I would suggest that Congress look especially at two key areas.

First, the restrictions that the National Voter Registration Act imposes on states who want to promptly remove ineligible voters from the rolls. And second, the loopholes in HAVA and the NVRA that make it too easy for illegal aliens and other non-citizens to register.

With regard to the NVRA, I would urge Congress to remove the unwise restrictions imposed by that law which make it extraordinarily difficult to remove voters who have failed to vote in two or more federal elections and have not responded to multiple notices from election authorities.

Allowing states, with proper notice, to remove voters who have not voted or responded to notices in four years covering two federal general elections would remove a dangerous potential source of “deadwood” from the voter rolls.

With regard to voting by illegal aliens, I suggest two common-sense reforms.

First, State Agencies should be able to ask applicants for services if those applicants are CITIZENS, before offering them a voter registration card. NVRA now prohibits agencies like welfare offices from asking that question.

Second, HAVA ought to be strengthened to make absolutely clear that voters must answer “YES” to the Citizenship question on the voter registration form in order to be able to cast a ballot.

Some states now claim that HAVA allows citizens who leave the question blank on the registration form to be legally registered and to vote.

Signing a statement in fine print, which many may not have read, or can claim not to have read, is no substitute for answering the specific, simple question with the appropriate “YES” or “NO” check in the box.

These are only a few of the many things that should be done to improve the quality of voter lists.

At stake is not only the integrity of the process, but the confidence of American citizens in the integrity of the process.

I would hope that there could bipartisan agreement on the importance of keeping the voter rolls free of illegal aliens and names of those who are no longer legally allowed to vote.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before this Committee.